

NDC BRIEFING

16 August 1956

THE SUZUK CRISIS

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Egypt desires to find the basis for a compromise settlement in the Suez dispute.

A. Suez's chief of cabinet, Ali Sabri, has expressed the opinion that with adequate assurances from London, Cairo would consider something short of full international control. It would be willing to consider an international treaty, to be registered with the United Nations, guaranteeing freedom of transit of the canal and with full provisions for sanctions in cases of violations.

B. Sabri reportedly also insisted that Egypt could reach an agreement with Britain and other users of the canal regarding an international convention regulating canal tolls, and that it would be willing to discuss an international advisory board with full rights of inspection.

C. Ali Sabri arrived in London on 16 August, presumably to be in a position to exploit opportunities for compromise.

D. Salah Salim, former Egyptian propaganda minister, is also in London through arrangement of the Cairo government.

E. Egypt's private and public utterances, however, do not indicate that it is ready to accept the kind of arrangement the British and French are insisting on.

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3. To prevent a possible military conflict, Nasser is also attempting to draw the West into some kind of prolonged negotiations, which might be difficult for the West to abandon. This maneuver apparently aims at gaining time to develop broad international support for Egypt's peaceful and moderate stand.

A. Nasser appears to have been successful in identifying his and Egypt's interests with those of other Arab countries. Examples are his references to the Suez as the Arab canal, and other recent statements by Arab political leaders that a Western attack on Egypt would be followed by officially condoned attacks on Western installations and personnel in other Arab countries.

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4. Despite Nasser's hope for settlement, Cairo is aware that a gap remains between Egypt's demands and the position of the Western powers. Egypt is therefore rushing its preparations to resist Western military intervention.

5. Egypt's intention to resist is reflected by redeployment of troops and equipment in its effort to strengthen the defenses of the delta, the canal zone and the coast. The extent of deployment from the Israeli front in the Sinai Peninsula is unknown, although a considerable amount of armor (possibly 2-3 regiments) and some artillery have been withdrawn. It is believed, however,

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that Egypt's principal first line force remains in Sinai, reflecting Nasser's statement on 11 August that possible Israeli exploitation of the situation worried him more than the possibility of British and French military intervention.

5. Antiaircraft and field artillery and armor have been observed moving west of Cairo, in the Alexandria area, and in the Western Desert. This redeployment reflects the belief that any attack outside the canal zone would be through the Western Desert—either overland from Libya or over the beaches west of Alexandria.

6. Egypt has instituted partial mobilization and has widely publicized the formation of a National Liberation Army, comprising the National Guard, youth battalions and volunteers. Even a women's battalion has been created. The government has also announced that arms would be issued to villages in the canal zone and other threatened areas.

7. The military effectiveness of the Egyptian army, together with its reserve forces, is strictly limited. Likewise, the current deployment effort is small and unimpressive. Nasser is striving to create the impression of a united nation determined to resist with all means available, however limited.

9. Meanwhile, early in the week Britain resumed the movement of troops to the Mediterranean by airlift and by sea--an estimated 4,000 troops had left by 14 August. In view of the existing British and French military commitments in the Mediterranean area, their military moves to date have not resulted in assembling forces adequate for effective intervention against Egypt.

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BACKGROUND: THE SUEZ CRISIS**THE EGYPTIAN MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT**

I. Ground: The Egyptian military establishment numbers about 95,000 men, of which 45,000 were deployed in the Sinai area at the beginning of the Suez crisis. Withdrawals from Sinai have probably not reduced the strength in Sinai appreciably below 40,000. The bulk of forces west of the canal are reserves and second line troops. Forty-one Centurion tanks (82mm gun) and about 30 T-34 tanks (85mm) have been reported in the Cairo and Alexandria areas.

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II. Air: Egyptian combat air strength includes approximately 100 jet fighters, 9 piston fighters, 35 jet light bombers, and 8 piston medium bombers.

There is some evidence that Egypt has commenced efforts to disperse its combat aircraft among an increased number of airfields in the delta-canal zone area.

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